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## Earmark Ban Sparks a Spat

Waters Takes Issue With Obey

By Steven T. Dennis and Tory Newmyer  
Roll Call Staff  
June 15, 2009, 12 a.m.

A plan by House Appropriations Chairman David Obey (D-Wis.) to ban "monuments to me" in this year's appropriations bills has been sharply criticized behind closed doors by a senior Democrat who wants to direct \$1 million to an employment center in her district bearing her name.

Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) confronted Obey in the Democratic whip meeting Thursday, complaining about his refusal to fund her earmark request for the Maxine Waters Employment Preparation Center in the Labor-Health and Human Services-Education appropriations bill, according to another Democratic Member and aides.

Obey told Waters that he was no longer allowing earmarks named after Members and would only make exceptions for people who are "dying."

Waters complained that the employment center had been named after her before she came to Congress in 1991. And she argued that it's in a poor part of her district that needs the money more than another earmark she requested, for Loyola Marymount University.

But Obey appears to be pre-emptively and quietly enforcing a ban on earmarks named after sitting Members, hoping to avoid a floor fight with Republicans intent on banning the practice.

A spokesman for Obey said Friday that he did not know whether Obey had decided to change the policy or what happened in the whip meeting.

An amendment by Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas) banning "monuments to me" passed on the Federal Aviation Administration authorization bill last month with just two Members voting in opposition, and a similar McCaul amendment passed on the military construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill last year.

McCaul had promised to offer his amendment on every appropriations bill this year, with the first bills scheduled to hit the floor this week.




Republicans have made the issue the cornerstone of their call for additional earmark reforms, targeting funding for the Charles B. Rangel Center for Public Service at the City College of New York and the John Murtha Johnstown-Cambria County Airport in Johnstown, Pa., among others. The Murtha airport in particular has received significant attention in recent months because of the millions Murtha has steered to it and the

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dearth of passengers it handles.

According to Waters' Web site, the employment center is part of the Los Angeles school system and the money will be used to buy materials, tools and equipment.

Waters also lists the employment center among her achievements on her Congressional biographical page.

The liberal California Democrat refused to discuss the meeting or her earmark requests in an interview last week, saying that she does not think caucus meetings should be discussed in public.

"Who comes out of these meetings and says these things?" she asked.

Republican earmark foes, meanwhile, were jubilant at the apparent change in policy — provided Obey follows through.

"If that in fact is happening, it means there's a recognition among an increasing number of Members that these 'monuments to me' are a really bad thing that the public believes is emblematic of waste and self-dealing," Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.) said.

"If this is the Obey policy, it is a big victory for us," said Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), the only appropriator who does not request earmarks and one of the chief critics of earmarks named for Members.

Kirk said the growing opposition to "monuments to me" reflects mounting concerns by the public about the record deficit and the fact that some of the most powerful Members who have projects named after them also are facing ethics clouds.

Several other House Members have their names etched into projects back home. House Majority Whip James Clyburn (D-S.C.) has a golf center and a pedestrian overpass named for him. Former Rep. Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.) has a parkway bearing her name in Atlanta. And Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska) had pushed for the construction of a \$231 million bridge to be called Don Young's Way.

But the practice appears more popular in the Senate.

Then-Senate Appropriations Chairman Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) earmarked money for improvements to the airport named for him in Anchorage, and then-Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.) did the same for his own eponymous airport near Pascagoula. For Sen. Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), there's Pat Roberts Hall at Kansas State University. And Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has a park in Bowling Green and a conservation fund.

But longtime appropriator and former Senate Appropriations Chairman Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) may be the most memorialized of all. The anti-earmarking group Citizens Against Government Waste has devoted a section of its Web site to chronicling more than 30 home-state projects named for him, including the Robert C. Byrd Locks and Dam, the Robert C. Byrd Academic and Technology Center, the Robert C. Byrd Clinic at the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine, the Robert C. Byrd High School, the Robert C. Byrd Visitor Center at Harpers Ferry National Historic Park, and several roads and highways.

Last year, as Republicans and earmark critics railed against the practice, Rep. Mike Doyle (D-Pa.) requested that his name be removed from the Doyle Center for Manufacturing Technology, built in 2003 with federal money that the lawmaker secured. The center, which houses local defense contractors, is now called DSN Innovations. Doyle did not seek an earmark for the center this year, explaining in a statement that "it was always our intention and belief that DSN would become self-sufficient, and they have."

Obey has pre-emptively enacted several other earmark reforms since becoming Appropriations chairman following the 2006 elections, each time successfully heading off efforts to eliminate earmarking.

Obey has cut the number of earmarks and greatly improved the transparency of the process, requiring that all requests be made public on Members' Web sites and that Members certify they are not personally benefiting from earmarks.



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